

WASHINGTON TIMES

21 November 1985

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A free market future for our spies?

The CIA lately has been making so persuasive a mess of things that probably the time has come to transfer the business to the private sector.

Certainly the change of venue ought to fit the ideological specifications of the Reagan administration. If it is true that the nation owes its greatness to its entrepreneurial genius, then why allow its safety to remain in the hands of muddled bureaucrats who can't tell the difference between a defector and a double agent?

Define espionage as a growth industry, and let the operation be run by a management team that acknowledges the moral beauty of the bottom line. Hire people that understand that a well-executed coup d'état deserves to be ranked with a \$1 billion merger or a \$500 million real estate deal.

Organized discreetly as "Potomac Associates," the new company would need to be privately held. The absence of stockholders would eliminate the nuisance of having to render a public account of the company's activities or a statement of its profit or loss. If the company could be structured as a tax shelter, the initial financing probably could be raised over a long Fourth of July weekend. A series of telephone calls to a consortium of patriotic interests ought to yield enough money to pay the agency's current expenses and provide for an expanded program of clandestine war.

Among the likely contributors, I can imagine the Heritage Foundation as well as Clint Eastwood and Johnny Carson, the Lockheed Corp. as well as General Dynamics, E.F. Hutton and Citibank, Joseph Coors and the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee, Richard Mellon Scaife, the Bechtel Corp., William F. Buckley, the American Legion, Rich-

ard Nixon, the editors of *Commentary* magazine, George Steinbrenner, Armand Hammer, and Joan Rivers.

Given an adequate budget of between \$30 billion and \$60 billion in the first year and relieved of the indignity of having to suffer questions

from members of Congress or the press, Potomac Associates would be free to do the work of liberty. Let the company offer its executives proper incentives and within a matter of weeks it would attract many of the vigorous young Americans now being drawn to careers in loan-sharking, casino gambling, and investment banking.

Suppose that the vice president in charge of Nicaragua accomplished the destruction of the Sandinista government. Instead of merely receiving a medal — which he couldn't wear to the opera or a dinner with Princess Diana — or a letter of commendation written on plain stationery in thin, Protestant prose, the hero of Managua would be entitled to a coffee plantation and hereditary right to manipulate the Nicaraguan currency.

Or suppose that the group vice president for Mediterranean affairs arranged the assassination of Muammar Qaddafi — not only would he receive a share of the Libyan oil revenue, but he also could expect a place on the National Security Council, and a seat on the board of TWA.

Let the forces of the free market come into play against the inertia of socialist economics, and Potomac Associates surely would return a handsome profit. The investors obviously could count on a percentage of the spoils from deregulation of governments in places like Angola and Iran; by shrewdly exploiting the secondary markets, they also could expect important money from the sale of theatrical and publishing rights.

Of the available deals, an exclusive contract with ABC probably would make the most sense. The network responsible for "Dynasty," "Nightline," and "Wide World of Sports" already has established an ethos in which combativeness, greed, and mindless competition appear as virtues devoutly to be wished. The transmutation of the Cold War into commercial melodrama or athletic spectacle should present only logistical difficulties.

At the very least the network deal would improve the public image of the American intelligence services. Instead of being seen as incompetent ideologues who lose track of Soviet master spies in small, well-

lighted Washington restaurants, the agents employed by Potomac Associates would be represented as men of action, daring, and resolute fellows capable of reading a menu in Italian and finding their way through Bulgarian customs.

On "Good Morning America" and "World News Tonight," a personable young woman could read daily reports of changes in the geopolitical weather, pointing out revolutionary disturbances and the movement of Communist fronts on a map of the world.

Whenever Potomac Associates captured a cadre of foreign terrorists, I can imagine their fate being decided every Sunday morning on a news show entitled "Day of Judgment." David Brinkley and George Will might preside over a drumhead tribunal, and maybe Barbara Walters could be persuaded to interview the prisoners about the foolishness of their politics and the sorrows of their childhood and early youth.

If the transfer of the CIA to the private sector accomplishes the results that the nation has every right to expect, then it might be prudent to consider assigning the management of both the State and Defense Departments to Lee Iacocca or the faculty at the Harvard Business School.

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